From: Freedom of Information  
Sent: 20 January 2021 15:27  
To:  
Subject: Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/20/532)

Dear

Freedom of Information Response (Our Ref: K/20/532)

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request dated 31 December 2020, reference K/20/532.

Your request read:

“I am writing to you under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to request the following information regarding your admissions process for your medical school.

Could you please answer the following questions:

1. How do you shortlist candidates for an interview?
   a. How is the personal statement utilised?
   b. How are entrance exam results utilised?
   c. How are widening access criteria utilised?
   d. Is a scoring system used?
      i. If YES - what is the nature of this?

2. What traits, qualities and/or attributes are assessed during the interview?
   a. What ‘stations’ or ‘tasks’ are used in order to assess these traits and attributes?

3. How are candidates marked or scored when in an interview?
   a. In an interview, who assesses the candidate? (medical school staff/other students etc)
   b. How is the threshold for success calculated? (i.e. is there a minimum score or are students compared to one another? etc)

4. After an interview how are borderline or equivalent cases decided upon with regards to acceptance or rejection?

5. What information is sent to candidates before, during and after the interview?”

The University of Leeds holds this information. For your convenience we have responded to each of your questions in turn below.

1. How do you shortlist candidates for an interview?

We assess application forms against academic criteria, considering past and predicted grades, and the applicants’ BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) score.

   a. How is the personal statement utilised?
We take into account any issues regarding mitigating circumstances raised in personal statements and academic references. Additionally, the forms are used to identify candidates who may be eligible to apply for the widening participation routes.

b. How are entrance exam results utilised?

The BMAT raw scores are typically used in the following manner: All scores from applicants are put into a normal distribution curve. Those candidates who are in the highest 20% receive a score of five out of five, and those who are in the lowest 20% receive a score of one out of five. Everything in between is scored according to where they are placed in this distribution.

c. How are widening access criteria utilised?

Our widening participation criteria can be found on our [website](#). Candidates who are eligible for the Access to Leeds programme are offered a two grade (or equivalent) drop in grade profile in addition to the standard offer. To meet the terms of this contextualised admissions offer they need to participate and pass the Access to Leeds programmes. Realising Opportunities is a similar programme running in the preceding year (year 12). Our Gateway programme is a six-year programme for widening participation students only. The typical offer for this course is BBC at A-level and the criteria used are the same as for Access to Leeds.

d. Is a scoring system used?

i. If YES - what is the nature of this?

The total score awarded is out of 37 points. 32 are for academic achievement and 5 for BMAT. The scoring details for BMAT are outlined in b.

2. What traits, qualities and/or attributes are assessed during the interview?

The traits that are assessed are those for all medical courses in the UK which can be found on the [Medical Schools Council website](#).

a. What ‘stations’ or ‘tasks’ are used in order to assess these traits and attributes?

Up until this year an eight-station Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) is used to assess candidates who are shortlisted to interview. This year, due to Covid-related restrictions this has moved to a six-station online MMI.

Candidates are assessed on three attributes per station; one of these attributes is always communication and the other attributes vary by station type.

We are withholding further information regarding the MMIs under section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please refer to the information set out below regarding the use of this exemption.

3. How are candidates marked or scored when in an interview?
a. In an interview, who assesses the candidate? (medical school staff/other students etc)

We are withholding this information under section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please refer to the information set out below regarding the use of this exemption.

b. How is the threshold for success calculated? (i.e. is there a minimum score or are students compared to one another? etc)

We do not use threshold scores. The attributes scores at interview are used to rank candidates. This ranking is used to determine who has an offer made to them.

4. After an interview how are borderline or equivalent cases decided upon with regards to acceptance or rejection?

We use a strict ranking process and therefore the number of offers is made directly using these ranks. There is no difference in the decision-making process for any candidate.

5. What information is sent to candidates before, during and after the interview?

Candidates are sent an invitation letter, comprehensive advice on the interview process and how to prepare for interview. They are advised on the conduct required at interview and are required to return a non-disclosure agreement to us prior to interview. After interview the candidates are informed on the status of their application and feedback is given to the cohort.

Section 36(2)(c)

We hope this general information is helpful. We are withholding more specific information under section 36(2)(c) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 36(2)(c) sets out that information is exempt from disclosure if, in the opinion of the organisation’s Qualified Person, its release would or would be likely to otherwise prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs. We have outlined the reason for engaging the exemption below, including an explanation of the public interest factors for and against disclosure.

We consider that to release this information would unduly prejudice the applications process. It is essential that applicants do not aim for a specific interview score, to include particular things in their personal statements etc. in an attempt to unduly influence the process. To release information which would be likely to encourage this behaviour would jeopardise our ability to objectively judge candidates and make offers accordingly. Applications must be made based on the candidates' individual merits, and the process is designed to test not only the applicants' academic achievements, but also a range of wider skills which are required for a career in medicine. To pre-empt this process would therefore undermine the process as a whole.
All candidates who are unsuccessful at interview stage are given focussed feedback to enable them to work on future applications. This information is carefully constructed to make sure that candidates do not focus on individual stations or scores as attributes are assessed across different stations and vary between cycles. To focus efforts in this way would in fact be likely to lessen their chances of success at MMI and would therefore not be in their interests.

Furthermore, candidates who attempt to ‘learn the test’ or ‘game the system’ may well have short term success (i.e. a score sufficient to secure an offer) but lack the inherent values and attributes to study medicine. It is therefore important to ensure that candidates are offering an honest account of themselves at interview; it would be imprudent to release information which could increase the likelihood of candidates being coached to pass the selection process, only to struggle while on the course.

As outlined above, to release this information would prejudice the admissions process. It would also be likely to unduly damage the prospects of prospective applicants to the medicine course; disadvantaging genuinely strong candidates who may lose out on places in favour of candidates whose artificially strong applications belie poor overall suitability. Accordingly, we are satisfied that disclosure would be likely to result in prejudice to the effective conduct of our ordinary business. It is therefore the opinion of Professor Simone Buitendijk, the Qualified Person for the University of Leeds, that the exemption is engaged.

As the exemption is engaged, it is also necessary to consider whether the public interest is in favour of withholding or releasing the information.

There is an extremely strong public interest in maintaining the integrity of the admissions process, and in turn protecting the value of the medicine degree offered by the University of Leeds. Allowing the admissions process to be undermined as outlined above would limit our ability to train and develop future generations of health care practitioners and leaders. This would de-value the course, which is recognised as being of extremely high quality and is therefore necessarily selective. This would not be in the interests of applicants and students, who would suffer as a result of the de-valued course. Nor would this be in our interests, as any de-valuing of the course would be likely to result in fewer applications, a reduction in student income and therefore a reduced ability to provide excellent teaching. It is therefore clear that the release of this information would not be in the public interest.

It is therefore the opinion of Professor Simone Buitendijk that the public interest is overwhelmingly in favour of withholding the information.

We hope this information is helpful. If you have any questions about this email, however, please do not hesitate to contact us on foi@leeds.ac.uk

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to make a complaint or request a review of our decision, you can request an Internal Review. Requests for Internal Review should be made in writing using the following contact information:
Requests for Internal Review should be submitted within 40 working days of receiving the University’s response to your request. Further information about how the University manages Freedom of Information requests and about our complaints procedure is also available on our website (www.leeds.ac.uk).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the review/complaints procedure provided by the University. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner’s Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Kind regards

Chloe Wilkins
Freedom of Information Officer

Secretariat
University of Leeds